

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE



2013-2014

Letters About Literature

Awards Ceremony

April 30, 2014

10:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m.

Columbia, South Carolina



south carolina
STATE LIBRARY

Introductions	Dr. Curtis R. Rogers, Coordinator, South Carolina Center for the Book
Welcome	Leesa Benggio, Deputy Director, South Carolina State Library Debbie Yoho, Chairperson, South Carolina State Library Foundation
Awards	Each student winner will be introduced by a South Carolina Letters About Literature judge. Winning students will read their letter and receive their award. Photos will be taken when students receive awards and a group photo will be taken at the end of the program.
Closing	Dr. Curtis R. Rogers

Level One

First Place	Banks Mitchell, Atheneum/Vine & Branches Home Educators, Conway
Second Place	Kaleb Cintonz, SC Virtual Charter School, Inman
Third Place	Blair Josephs, Atheneum/Vine & Branches Home Educators, Conway

Level Two

First Place	Surya Korrapati, Meadow Glen Middle School, Lexington
Second Place	Elizabeth Clapp, Meadow Glen Middle School, Lexington
Third Place	Muayad Sarhan, Riverside Middle School, Greer

Level Three

First Place	Joshua P. Brandt, SC Virtual Charter School, Columbia
Second Place	Brooke Ashlyn Thomas, Pickens High School, Pickens
Third Place	Samantha Wagner, Pickens High School, Pickens

Dear Mr. E. B. White,

Friendship, loyalty, and hope are powerful themes nestled within the pages of your tender book, *Charlotte's Web*. Each spoke to my heart.

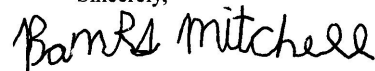
Charlotte and Wilbur's unique friendship especially touched me. I kept thinking about my dad the whole time I read *Charlotte's Web*. He and I are best friends. Charlotte's devotion and sheltering of Wilbur made me smile as I remembered a recent time when Dad cosseted me from charging cows, while fishing at my great-grandmother's pond. It was a peaceful morning. The water glinted in the sunshine. The breeze danced through nearby trees. We knew her cows grazed all day in the pasture, but didn't know where they were. So naturally I wasn't anxious—until four cows started loping toward me. Dad made himself look really big by spreading his arms out and making boisterous cow noises. They must have been scared, because they turned and strolled away. Dad protected me like Charlotte always watched out for Wilbur. As a true friend, Charlotte remained loyal with steadfast devotion to the end of her life. That made her extra special in my mind! I learned from her example the irreplaceable value of genuine friendship.

Equally important, *Charlotte's Web* encouraged me to have hope. Circumstances looked dark for Wilbur, like his impending trip to the butcher, but Charlotte taught him to live in expectation of bright tomorrows even when she herself was about to die. She reminded him of an assured future where he would live secure and safe. After all, "nothing can harm you now" because "all these sights and sounds will be yours to enjoy." Some of her last words to Wilbur were filled with hope about "...this lovely world, these precious days." Charlotte built a solid foundation of continual hope for Wilbur through their lively conversations.

Likewise, my mom has instilled this concept of hope by encouraging me to live in a state of anticipation without fear or anxiety. She frequently says, "Wait to worry—until tomorrow. Live in peace today." If more people would practice this every day, their lives would be full of expectancy and joy. I try to pass this along to other members of my family when they seem to need a little lift.

Charlotte's Web taught me that a strong support system mixed with a little hope enable me to live a happy life, no matter my circumstances. For example, when the bases are loaded, as the catcher I stand ready at home plate, glove outstretched and cleats firmly placed. When I see six soccer players charging, as goalie, I stand my ground with arms and legs twitching, ready to react. When I feel a shark on my fishing line, I brace for its darting drive. In the end, I've decided that I'll wait to worry and live in peace today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Banks Mitchell". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Banks" written in a larger, more prominent style than the last name "Mitchell".

Banks Mitchell, Grade 4

Dear Daniel Defoe,

I recently read your book "Robinson Crusoe", and thought I had a lot in common with Robinson. Like Robinson I was scared, lonely, angry, and determined at one time in my life. When I was five, I was diagnosed with Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia. It felt a lot like being put on a deserted island. I was scared about what would happen. Would I live or would I die?

"Then I sat down and cried like a child. I never felt so lonely as at that moment. I never felt so helpless and lost." Robinson was feeling exactly like I was the moment the doctors explained to me what Leukemia was. I was lonely. I could not see my friends or family for a while. I did not know what I should do or what to do next. "Where shall I go?" "What shall I do?" Robinson knew the questions flying through my scared mind.

I was so angry! What did I do to deserve Cancer? I am sure Robinson had a similar question. What did I do so wrong to be all alone on this island? Could this have been his question to himself? In my mind I thought of all the bad things I had done and wondered if I was being punished. Robinson could have been doing the same thing looking at the ocean all around him with no one in sight.

Before reading "Robinson Crusoe", I still felt like I was alone. I may not have been on a deserted island but I felt alone in my Cancer, and how I was feeling. I now know I have never been alone in my feelings. Everyone who has had a life threatening illness like Cancer has felt this way too. Unlike Robinson I did have people backing me up. My mom, dad, and brother helped me every step of the way. I could not see that then but I do now!

I am sure Robinson had a hard time fitting back in with people like I am now. He was away twenty eight years. I was away only three! His friends did not remember him and his family had passed. My friends have moved on but my family is still supporting me every day. I am very blessed.

I have come to realize that bad things happen to good people. I see now that if you are brave and determined you can survive just about anything. Just like Robinson, just like me!

Sincerely,

Kaleb Cintonz

Dear Louisa May Alcott,

I love spending time with family: playing games, going on trips, and taking vacations. We enjoy board games; watch movies; play croquet, volleyball, basketball; and swim together. In today's society I don't see this kind of family connection very often. As I was reading *Little Women*, I treasured the March family's sweetness and closeness. I found your novel fascinating, adventurous, and sad with many topics to appreciate, including numerous moral lessons.

I adore reading classic stories. They interest me with how people lived decades or even centuries ago, their values, and how characters connect to one another through activities and circumstances. The March children ice skated, acted out stories, played games, and always ate meals together as a family. Sometimes I wish I lived in a time when families did all their activities together.

When people watch TV, play video games, or talk on phones, I notice they don't really talk to each other or truly spend time together. And yet, the March sisters bonded together naturally—without electronics. Beth played the piano so beautifully. Jo wrote amusing dramas for her sisters, and sometimes Laurie, to act out. These were a few of my favorite parts in *Little Women*. I also play the piano, so I liked that Beth and I have a common passion.


It really surprised me when Jo cut off her beautiful long hair so the family could have some money. It would be extremely hard to make such a decision, but if I were in a similar situation, I would do the same for my family. Another surprise occurred the day Jo, Laurie, and Amy went ice skating. When the ice broke, Amy fell in the pond. That worried and concerned me. At first I didn't think they would be able to save her from the freezing water.

I found the whole lime incident with Amy interesting but sad. Amy learned a lesson, but I didn't like when the teacher struck her. It seems extremely harsh for a teacher to do that to a student. I'm sorry to say, but it would be a little nicer if you took the struck part out.

The way your characters endured real hardships during the 1800s kept me thinking throughout the whole book. Beth was one of those hardships. Back then scarlet fever was a common, highly contagious disease. Even with medical attention, it was serious—affecting entire households. I understand now why you sent Amy to Aunt March's house.

In the midst of hardship and suffering Mrs. March, the kind mother, made right choices and taught her girls great manners. Their father returned home from the army shortly before Beth died from scarlet fever. I felt very concerned and scared for him because he was parting with a beloved child. All in all, the Marches made me feel full of joy and confidence through their family connection and sisterly love.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Blair Josephs". The ink is dark and the writing is fluid, with a large, stylized 'B' and 'J'.

Blair Josephs, Grade 5

January 10, 2014

Dear Mohandas K. Gandhi (Gandhiji),

Life. That one word has immersed all humans in mystery, yet after I have read your autobiography, I understand what life is. People talk about you as a god, but I know you are not a god, but a venerable citizen doing what is right for your people. Before I read your book, *Autobiography: The Story of My Life*, life to me was an endless cycle of waking up, going to school and going back to bed. Life was just an ordinary word that meant nothing but repetition. The first time I opened your book, I read, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." Afterwards, I thought about that quote, and realized it had a deeper meaning. If I step out of my comfort zone and try to understand why people behave in different ways, for the first time I would be able to see things in a new light. So from that day on, I took your advice and now, I am able to see in "color".

I have seen many people around my school either bullying or ignoring others around them. I was never able to understand why they were hurting the education other children were receiving. One typical day, I witnessed the bullying of my Indian friend. Your words suddenly popped into my mind. I wanted to see change and I wanted this violence to stop! I went up to the bully and asked him to calm down and stop. This bully was a tall, husky 8th grader who was much larger than me and could have squished me like a bug. Yet he just stopped and walked away. I get it now. Life is what you make of it. Life is not endless cycles of boring, it's the beauty that one person can make a profound impact on another person's life.

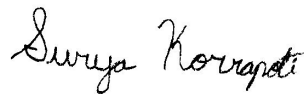
I realized that I am the voice of change. I **can** make a difference in everyday life. Your book has inspired me to become a responsible citizen just like you. When I first read your autobiography, I saw it as a job, something I had to do. But after a while, I realized it's not a job, rather it is a blessing. In India, your life was filled with hate and oppression, yet in all the chaos you found peace and lifted

India to independence, just like a desert cactus survives in the harsh, desert heat. You have indirectly challenged me to become a leader and do what's right as a whole.

Since reading your book, I have become a disciple in the ways of peace and nonviolence. I have a new outlook on life. You have changed the way that I see the world. The world is not just a minuscule piece of rock in the middle of space, but a creation of life that was blessed upon us and it is something we as a whole must embrace. Without you, I would be a speck of dust in the desert. A speck that no one would notice, restrained to the memories of yesterday. Your book has allowed me to break the chains that bounded me to a normal, repetitive life.

"Nobody can hurt me without my permission." I will remember that quote from your book until the day I cease to exist. I am the change I want to be and I will not let anybody stand in my way. Because of you not only has my life changed, but so has my friends' and family's. Thank you so much for changing my life and allowing me to see life in a whole new perspective. I will always remember what you said, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world". And I will be the change in this world.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Surya Korrapati". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter 'S' being particularly large and stylized.

Surya Korrapati

January 8, 2013

Dear Shane Koyczan,

When I look in the mirror, I see nothing wrong, but it wasn't always that way. Some say they aren't pretty like other people; an illusion we are pulling on ourselves. I hear a line from your poem '*To This Day*' in my mind- 'If you don't see anything beautiful about yourself, get a different mirror, look a little closer, stare a little longer.' I have realized with your poem that it is not the physical appearance that needs to change, but the mental expectations.

I hate hearing people telling themselves they don't like the way they look, both on the Internet and in real life. Appearance isn't what matters, we just need to change our mindset and much like a line in your poem, we must start to except that our definition of beauty can be ourselves and the ones around us, not just models and superstars.

It also hurts to be a victim of the overlooked verbal bully, or be a bystander. I have been asked if I cut myself or if I am anorexic and I've learned to overlook such comments, even if those statements are lies. I've been told the entirety of my life that I am quiet, as if it was a disease to be cured. In today's modern world, media and society have a high expectation of beauty, so that causes not only people to be hard on themselves, but it gives them an excuse to be hard on others. After hearing your poem, listening to it on repeat, crying because it was so motivational, and listening again, I realize that the problem is not me, it is their mindset, thinking I am not pulchritudinous the way I am.

A positive comment I hear often is that I would make a great model. I don't disagree, but there's a reason why I have never heard this from my peers, just teachers and friends' parents. The ones who are older have lived through the pressure of others, including you, and have changed expectations. The adults have learned how to live with themselves, unlike the pressured high schooler, who is willing to starve for beauty. Shane, we should change appearance because we want to, not because we are pressured to.

Though I have never had a boyfriend, I think I am beautiful. Though I have acne plaguing my face, I think I am beautiful. Though I have never worn make-up to school, I think I am beautiful. Even if I have never been a model or in a movie, I think I am beautiful. I don't need to redefine myself to redefine 'beauty' and I have learned this with your poem. Thank you for helping me change my expectations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth Clapp". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

—Elizabeth Clapp—

Dear Harper Lee,

Your book *To Kill a Mockingbird* has touched me in many ways, ways I can relate to with an indescribable feeling. I have experienced much prejudice during my school years; a lot like the prejudice that Scout had to face, yet in my case the prejudice was towards me and my religion, Islam, while the prejudice against Scout was towards Atticus and the courage that he had to stand up for a Negro.

If anyone could look at me, they may think I am normal, yet I mentally condition myself to be "normal." Because of the prejudice against me, I decided it would be best for me to just "act normal" like all of the other kids. For as long as I can remember, I have been thought of as a person other than the average child. Just because of my religion, I have been called many unreasonable and racist stereotypes such as, "terrorist," and many more. I thought that my unique situation would never end.

Only while reading your book did I discover that prejudice is toward not only a race or religion, but it also can be aimed towards a person's beliefs. When Cecil Jacobs was bullying Scout at school, Atticus told her to keep her head up, and walk away; that is exactly what I did. Walking away was not easy, but it did keep me out of trouble, and it gave me a great sense of confidence within my beliefs.

For a while, I had no friends and I felt abandoned by the whole world, until I read your book and found that life has many meanings. My life is the only substantial and solid thing that I can change, not any other person, only me. During the story, Scout shows a great amount of courage and sensitivity. To be like Scout would be an honor, but if I were to face the prejudice thrown at her, I would never survive. I learned a lot from the tips of Atticus and the examples, led by Scout, of what to do, and what not to do.

Tom Robinson, being African American and accused of rape, was a major target of racism. I too have been accused of a fault that I did not commit. One time in the fourth grade, where I was accused of stealing a cellphone, yet the girl who stole the phone never said a word. She supported everyone against me. This girl was racist and only had respect for herself, not others. This is only one of many occasions where I have been beaten by the power of prejudice. While trying to "be normal", I noticed that being me is more important than being anything else that the world and my surroundings would want me to become. Scout was proud of her father, and I am proud of my religion.

Being different from the ordinary teenager is not easy, no matter how you are different, but only after reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* have I realized that prejudice can be towards everyone. Prejudice can be aimed not only towards religion, but also towards anything that makes a person different from the common person. To be different is not easy, but your book helps people understand that everyone is different and unique. No person should be given less equality or less importance. We are all equal, all humans, and we should treat everyone the same. Just like Scout, Jem, Atticus and Tom Robinson, we should fight for the rights of all humans. The beliefs of Atticus can be put into place. He believes that all are equal: the homeless and the Rockefellers, the stupid man and Einsteins, they are all equal. We are all unique in our own ways, but we are all humans, and all men are created equal.

Sincerely,
Muayad Sarhan



John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, Professor
University of Oxford
University Offices, Wellington Square
Oxford OX1 2JD, United Kingdom

Dear Mr. Tolkien:

It has been said that fantasy is a thing only for children. Some call it silly, childish superstition, and ridicule the very idea. But that is not what I believe. Not now, anyway. I used to think that fantasy was stupid, and just a lot of nonsense that got stuck in a person's head, but then I read a book that changed my mind completely. It was only last year, the spring of 2012, when I decided to read your epic book, *The Lord of the Rings*. I was bored with all the dull and uninteresting things I had read over the past while, so this seemed a good challenge to me, being a massive novel with over one thousand pages of near-microscopic writing. I suppose it would only be fair to say that this book transformed me to a large degree. Not only did this book make me question my moral ethics and help me through a difficult time, but it also singlehandedly caused me to respect fantasy books, and fantasy in its entirety. It made me see the world through a new perspective, and I am tremendously grateful I read your book.

As I read your book, the adventure kept becoming more exciting; it was difficult for me to put the book down. This is partly because the friendship in your book really touched my heart, as it is unparalleled in much of modern literature. The Fellowship, the people who have sworn to try help Frodo destroy the One Ring, are bound together with ties of trust and companionship. This is particularly seen when the Fellowship is running away from the monstrous beast, the Balrog. The wizard, Gandalf the Grey, intervenes, battling the Balrog so that the rest of the Fellowship can escape. As the Fellowship flee, the Balrog falls, but Gandalf is also killed. As I read this, a startling question struck me: Would I do that for my friends? Certainly. That is what I answered myself, but I was thinking about smaller things, like standing up for my friends if they were being bullied. But Gandalf actually laid down his life so that his friends could survive. Would I lay down my life for my friends like that? I found myself unsure about the answer to this question. I began to contemplate this, and I resolved to try and be a better friend. Since then, I have become a better person, and I can assure you that I would lay down my life so that a friend may live.

It is very easy to relate in Frodo, in the sense that he is entrusted with this massive burden, the wicked and corruptive One Ring, and is sent out to destroy it so that it may cause no more harm. Luckily, he has some wonderful friends who help share his burden. In 2010, my family and I relocated from Washington to South Carolina. It was an enormous transition, moving from the grey and the rain to the clear blue and sunshine. That is perhaps the greatest “One Ring” in my life. It was terribly difficult to leave all my friends and all I knew, and go to South Carolina. But, just as Frodo had his friends to help him along his journey, I had my friends to help me. Even though we are all separated by distance, we still care, and we still share our burdens with each other. I miss them, and that is still a burden in my heart. But Frodo did eventually destroy the One Ring. He cast it into the fire, and he survived. This gives me hope, and I know that one day, though I will still love and cherish them, the terrible yearning to be back with my friends will be gone.

I hadn’t read much fantasy until then, mainly due to the fact that I thought fantasy was childish rubbish fit only for young people with vivid and crazy imaginations. That is what I believed before I read your book, but afterwards, my opinion about fantasy began to change. I was astounded to learn so much about all the species in your book. From hobbits, to elves, to dwarves, every page was filled with fascinating information about different fantastic creatures, all of which you had created in-depth and mesmerizing cultures for. The fantasy I had read in the past was light-hearted and for children, but your book is fantasy not only for young readers, but for people of all ages who enjoy incredible stories. The various incantations and spells spoken in the book have magical properties, and so did the words on the pages. Those words worked wonders with me, molding me from a hardened cynic into a person that had come to realize the true beauty in fantasy. Thanks to your book, I have come to acknowledge just how magnificently splendid myth and magic really is.

I do not even know how to begin to thank you for writing your book. You have changed me. You have changed how I view myself – I am a much better friend now. Your book is helping me through a time of great hardship in my life – I now have hope that peace will come to me. With your book, my views of fantasies have changed – I now have acquired a deep respect for myth, folklore, and tales that reflect many different cultures. I now look around me and think, “It is truly wonderful to live in the world I live in. I am thankful that evil doesn’t haunt my every step, and I am glad that the world I live in isn’t cursed and ravaged by the dark forces of the earth.” Yes, life is filled with burdens, and my burden is no exception, but nonetheless I am joyful and filled with hope about my future. Frodo got rid of his One Ring. So shall I.

With the deepest and most profound thanks,

Joshua Brandt

Dear Mr. Albom,

You have probably received letter upon letter concerning your book, Tuesdays with Morrie, and it is most likely due to its overwhelming ability to touch people's hearts. The tale is a fantastic one, and not because it is simply a "good story," but also because it has an essence that can reach out to readers, grab hold of them, and pull them into an entirely new point of view. It is in this way that your book has probably saved my life completely.

I was never a particularly happy person, though I should have been. I have no reason to complain about my life for, in comparison to others, my life is a dream. I live comfortably, I have a stable and supportive family, and I have never had to struggle to succeed. Yet, I always felt as though I were missing something, although, it had never occurred to me that, perhaps, through all my vanity and self-importance, it was me in the wrong.

Like many adolescent girls, with nothing on their minds but boys, shopping, and friends, I had pushed all the blame onto the "universe." The "universe" hated me. The "universe" did not want me to have a boyfriend, or that new jacket, or time to spend with my friends *and* do my homework. I was comfortable with focusing on material things and throwing the blame onto some other entity when I did not get what I wanted. One denied desire of mine that dreadfully disturbed me was having a boyfriend.

Since middle school, I was forced to watch as the other girls of the school walked hand in hand with their beaus, giggling and smiling. It all seemed so foreign to me. I wanted that. I envied those girls, and I wished for that every day. Every time, it seemed, I would become infatuated with a boy, the way young girls tend to do, I would be promptly shot down. It was as if I were a rookie pilot during World War I and every boy were a Red Baron prepared to blast me from the sky. I would then nose dive and crash into the ocean of my own self-pity. It was all a bit dramatic, but then again, many teenage girls are the epitome of dramatic.

On the second Tuesday you talk about in your book, Morrie and Mitch also discuss self-pity. Of course, Morrie's circumstances make my situation seem like a happy day at the park, but to me it was important enough to make a connection. Morrie takes a different perspective than I had. He believed he was lucky even when a disease as horrible as ALS was ailing him. I could not imagine contracting ALS, but when I read this, I decided I would see this book to its end. I am incredibly thankful that I did.

I began to emulate Morrie's positivity in however small a way I could. Soon, I began to see his philosophies working in my everyday life. One of the most impactful philosophies Morrie brought to my attention was the Buddhist idea of detachment. When Morrie described it, it just made sense. He said not to bottle the emotions or throw them away, but to completely submerge yourself in the sorrow, or anger, or even happiness. He said to let it fill every inch of you, to penetrate you; only then can you truly let go. I paralleled it to reading a book. You must first read the book, the whole book; then, once you know its contents by heart, you may place it back onto the shelf.

It proved to be an exceedingly handy concept when I had my heart truly broken for the first time. Before, I would have broken down. I would have resigned myself to my room for days, like I said previously; I was fond of theatrics back then; however, now it was different. Now, I could see how inane it was to place so much of my soul onto a matter that would be so trivial in the end.

Another vice that your book has made steps to cure me of is my pride. I have always been a proud girl, even as a small child. My mother would have to constantly remind me of my place. On the twelfth Tuesday, when Morrie touches on forgiveness, I recognized this flaw in my personality. I forgave that boy I mentioned earlier for breaking my heart, but, at the same time, I had to forgive myself. While vying for his attention, I had turned into a creature I was ashamed to come to terms with. Still, I had to forgive myself. I had to banish the pride that stood so adamantly in my way and cast it out of my being. I do not want to be full of regrets when I die, so I am taking Morrie's advice; I am fixing it while I still am able.

Now, I have taken it a step further. I began delving into religion over the summer, and I have found it to be healing. I am in the midst of studying to be a Catholic Christian and am attending R.C.I.A (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) classes. I have learned so much about my religion, and it has also begun to change me as a person. I would have never considered this had it not been for your book which gave me the desire to do so. Even though Morrie says he is agnostic, his teachings persuaded me to give it a try, and due to my new found beliefs, I suspect your book has not only saved my life but my eternity as well.

Morrie's wisdom has really changed my life. His battles against feeling sorry for one's self has proved to be a tremendous testimony for my life. The ingenious idea of detachment has

Thomas 4

become a motto and mantra for me. His lessons on forgiveness have helped me reevaluate myself. I am so grateful that this book found its way into my possession. It has made me not only a happier person but also more pleasant.

With the Deepest Sincerity,

Brooke A. Thomas

Dear Mitch Albom,

I watched a sunset on Thursday. It was stunning, truly one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. The orange and pink painted the sky, and the clouds parted just enough for the golden orb to be seen as it peeked over the horizon. The mountains surrounding my school stood like guardians welcoming the rising sun as the cold winter fog crept away back into the shadows from whence it came. As I watched the beauty all around me, I couldn't help but think of you.

I read Tuesdays with Morrie as an assigned project in my English class. The teacher promised us, as teachers always do, that we would love the book. Its message, she claimed, was one that lived beyond the pages, instead making residence in the chambers of the human heart. She was right. Your story changed my world forever. Morrie changed it. I can no longer bypass a sunrise, a sunset or a crisp fall day. I no longer take for granted the wonder of life, the strength of my body, and the love of my family. Every good thing that I have been given, every blessing, every moment, every sunrise, is infinitely more precious than it ever was before. Your book taught me that. In 192 pages I learned to value the everyday blessings that surround me. I learned to value life. I hope and pray that you smile knowing that Morrie's last lesson is still teaching a world of eager students.

That year, junior year, was a stressful time. It was the beginning of the end, one of the final hurdles in my journey from a high school child into a college adult. During Junior year I worried about test scores, grades, extracurriculars, and a host of other details that seemed overpowering in their sheer number. I rushed from classes, to sports, to home, and eventually back to school. My days seemed to be both too short and too long, a collection of stress and lackluster nothings easily forgotten in the story of my life. I was living for the future without ever considering the worth of the moment. It was during the utter chaos of final semester that I read your book. I read of one Professor named Morrie and one student named Mitch. I read about their friendship, their journey, and their talks with one another. I read of Morrie, a man who, though he was dying of ALS, lived more in each day than most souls live in a lifetime. Your Morrie, your professor, was a wonderful man. I doubt that I could have the courage to laugh at my body's weakness. I doubt I could listen as my friends and family attended my "living funeral." I doubt that I could smile as my muscles failed me. I doubt I could face death with such grace, but Morrie did. He accepted that life was short. He knew the worth of each day and the power of each moment. Morrie enjoyed the simple pleasures of this life. You wrote of his love of dancing, of his quiet enjoyment of his study window, and of his passion for teaching. You wrote of the simplicity of being in his presence, how the world faded away as you spoke one-on-one with such an amazing man. You wrote of Morrie's ability to forget the worries, the stress, and the future and instead live wholly in the present. In the pages of your book I saw one man's passion for life, and I came to love mine even more.

Until I read Tuesdays with Morrie I had not appreciated just how short life truly is. I could not fathom that at any moment the body I have been given, the family I love, and the sunrises I

typically slept through could be wrenched away. I might not get the chance to say goodbye as Morrie did. I might not get to teach that last lesson, give that last hug, or watch one more view outside my window. I might lose the chance I have to be truly thankful for all that I have been given.

If Tuesdays with Morrie taught me anything, it was the fleeting nature of this life and the value of everyday blessings. I have never been more thankful to walk, more thankful to sing, and more thankful to hug my family. I have never watched the leaves fall in autumn with the same appreciation. I have never tasted a cookie with the same delight, and I have never heard the rain with the same joy. I have been blessed abundantly, and each moment I am given on this green earth is a gift. Thank you, Morrie, I hope you are smiling. Thank you Mr. Albom, for publishing Morrie's final lesson, and for teaching a young girl the value of life and the worth of the moment.

God bless,

Samantha Wagner

2013-2014 Judges

Melanie Barton *Executive Director,
South Carolina Education Oversight Committee*

Curtis Derrick *Faculty, English & Humanities,
Midlands Technical College*

Jenny Dilworth *Children's Librarian
Richland Library*

Dr. Patricia E. Feehan *Associate Professor
USC School of Library & Information Science*

Joyce Hansen *Children's Author*

Jonathan Haupt *Director,
The University of South Carolina Press*

Dr. Dianne Johnson *Author & Professor,
USC School of English Language & Literature*

Denise R. Lyons *Director of Library Development,
South Carolina State Library*

T.J. Wallace *2014 SC Book Festival Director,
The Humanities Council^{SC}*

About ReadSC.org

The South Carolina Center for the Book

The South Carolina Center for the Book is the South Carolina Affiliate of the Library of Congress Center for the Book and is a cooperative project of the South Carolina State Library, the University of South Carolina School of Library and Information Science and the Humanities Council^{SC}. The Center is located at 1500 Senate, Columbia, SC.

The South Carolina Center for the Book celebrates South Carolina's rich literary heritage and brings public attention to the importance of books, writers and reading.

The South Carolina Center for the Book envisions a state where there is a community focus on the joy and value of reading.

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